In this conversation I'd like to discuss with you the importance of validation, meaning recognition of other person's emotions as being valid and worthwhile.

Alright!

Imagine a time when you recently felt negative, sad, or stressed, and expressed that to someone else.

Do you have something in mind?

Yes

OK, great.

So, in that situation when you expressed a strong emotion to someone else, how did they respond? What did they say?

it was not my fault

More likely than not, their response had an effect on you, at least a little.

On the one hand, the person could have said or done something validating. They might have reassured you that your emotions made sense, or showed you they understood you.

On the other hand, their response could have been invalidating, for example by refusing to listen to you or indicating that you were overreacting or "crazy".

Does it make sense?

y

Do you think that "it was not my fault" was validating or invalidating?

Validating

So, they made you feel heard and understood, like your feelings were not wrong.

How did their validating response make you feel?

a little better

In general, validation makes us believe that we are being heard and understood, which usually feels good.

Invalidating statements, like "you're crazy", or ignoring or belittling you, would have the opposite effect, don't you think?

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Mutual validation is a great way to maintain relationships. When you validate someone, you show them that what they are feeling or thinking is okay, without any judgment.

Can you think of any ways that your friends and family validate you?

Yes

What are some of the validating things they do?

hugs, questions, analogies to their experiences

It's so nice to be validated!

When people are present and hear us out, or listen and reflect back what we have said, or can relate from personal experience, saying things like "that could have happened to anyone" — we tend to feel validated.

When we feel validated, it's very calming, don't you think?

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Do you ever validate other people?

Yes

Nice. What are some ways that you validate other people?

reassuring messages

Importantly, validation is not necessarily about agreeing with the other person or feeling the same emotions that they feel.

When you validate someone, you are simply acknowledging their perspective, without judgment.

Validation is also a great way to de-escalate an argument. Have you ever ended an argument by simply saying something validating to someone?

Yes

It's actually very empowering, isn't it?

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Validation can be difficult but it's useful to practice. You can practice validating other people who have perspectives that you disagree with.

Think of a person who stands for something that is completely opposite from your beliefs.

Can you think of anyone in your life right now who you completely disagree with?

No

Well, maybe you're lucky in that regard!

If you ever do encounter a person you disagree with about something, I'd encourage you to try and find one kernel of truth (however small) and practice validating that, even though you don't agree with the perspective.

But remember, it's not wise to validate things that are objectively false. Feelings and emotions are never falsifiable, so those can always be validated.

Continue

In addition to validating other people, it is also helpful to practice validating yourself. Just like when we validate others, self-validation can de-escalate an intense emotional situation.

Do you ever make soothing statements to yourself, or talk to yourself to calm down, when you experience intense negative emotions?

No

It might sound weird, but I'd encourage you to try it. Many people actually find this really helpful.

OK

Telling yourself validating things like "my emotions are okay, it is okay that I feel this way", or "of course it makes sense that I feel this way, I've been upset about this for a while" can be really helpful.

Can you think of any self-validating statements that you could use or say to yourself next time you feel emotional?

you have an amazing mind

Awesome.

Do you think that "you have an amazing mind" is something a close friend or loved one might say to you?

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Some psychologists think about validation in six "levels" — you can think of these as different ways to validate another person (or yourself), with different levels of engagement.

Want to hear more about the six levels of validation?

Yes

The first level of validation is simply being present and actively listening to another person.

Have you ever been talking to someone who seemed to be on their phone the whole time, rather than listening to you?

y

Many people would be annoyed by this, because It would feel like the person on their phone wasn't listening to, understanding, or valuing the conversation.

It would be much better to talk to someone who's making eye contact, leaning in, and hearing you, don't you think?

y

The second level of validation has to do with reflection. When a person tells you something they are upset about, you can briefly summarize and re-state, with care, what you understood from them.

That way, you can really communicate that you have understood them. This can also help avoid miscommunication.

Continue

The third level of validation involves intuiting how a person is really feeling, beyond the words they say, based on their other behavior and actions.

For example, have you ever had a friend who said they were fine, but you actually knew that something was bothering them because they weren't acting like their usual self?

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It's kind of like that. Being able to "read between the lines" in this way shows the person in distress that they are known and understood, which is a strong form of validation.

Have you ever had a loved one who was able to tell when something was bothering you?

Yes

Doesn't that make you feel validated?

You can also be this person for someone else. Look for things like body language, activity, and whether a person is behaving typically. But, at the same time, you should avoid making too many assumptions.

Got it

The fourth level of validation is to interpret a person's behavior and emotions based on the context of that person's prior experiences.

For example, most people would be excited to enter a room full of puppies. But, if my friend had been attacked by a dog as a child, do you think she'd be excited about this?

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Using the fourth level of validation, I could tell my friend, "your emotions in this situation make total sense, with your prior experiences in mind".

You can also use this level of validation with yourself, considering how your own reactions make sense in the context of your past.

Continue

Finally, the highest levels — the fifth and sixth level of validation — have to do with empathically understanding a person's feelings and reaction on a very deep level, for example, from having both been in a similar situation.

Got it

None of these levels of validation is "better" or "worse" than any other — they are just different ways of validating someone.

Which type of validation do you think you are best at? Which comes most naturally to you?

i need practice

Thanks for talking to me about validation.

So, to recap, with validation you acknowledge that you hear and understand another person's perspective, without judgment, even if you don't have the same view.